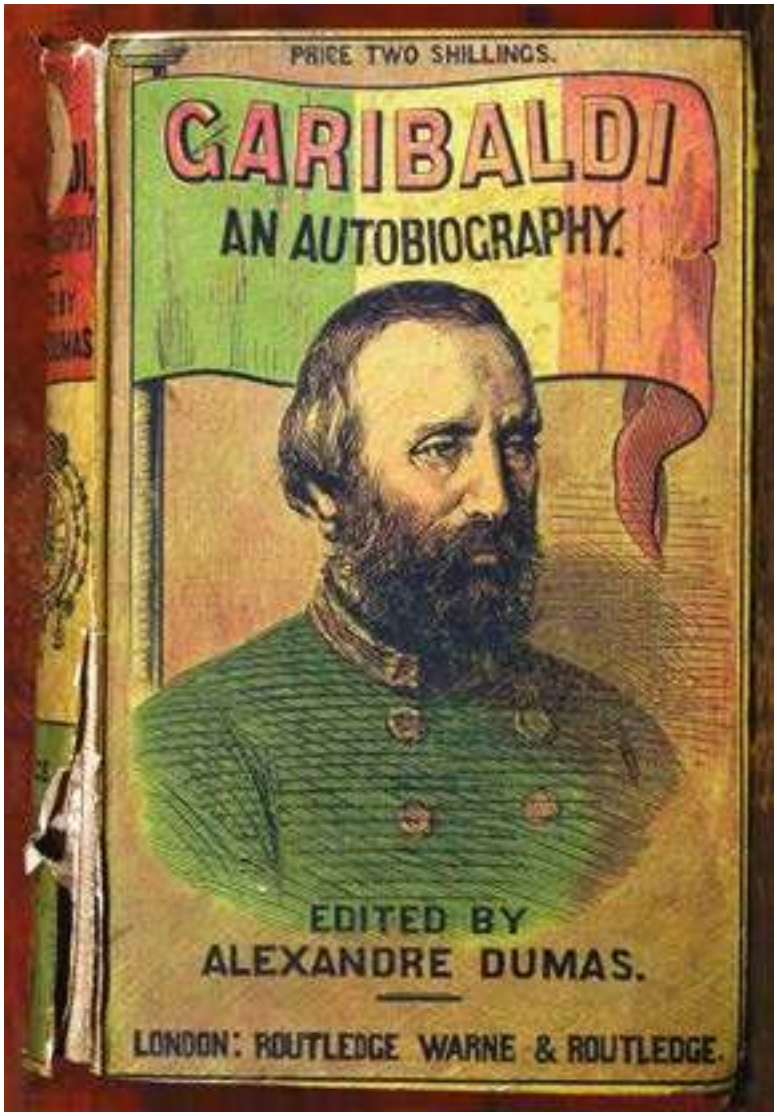


Garibaldi in London

Marcella Pellegrino Sutcliffe examines the political machinations behind a visit to England in 1864 of the Italian patriot and 'liberator', darling of the English establishment and radicals alike.

Above left: the cover of the 1860 English edition of Garibaldi's autobiography. Above: the grand entry of Victor Emmanuel and Garibaldi into Naples in September 1860 from the last scene of a 'moving' panorama, probably created in Nottingham, and first exhibited in Derby that year.

A HUNDRED AND FIFTY YEARS AGO Giuseppe Garibaldi, 'the General', leader of the Italian movement of national liberation, undertook a visit to England that would become legendary. From the outset it was clear to observers that the appearance of such a global 'celebrity' would carry extraordinary political weight. The charismatic patriot had achieved international fame as leader of the 'expedition of the Thousand' in 1860, freeing the south of Italy from the tyranny of the Bourbons and handing it to Victor Emanuel II. In 1862 his heroic reputation was further boosted by the news that, while heading an expedition to liberate Rome and complete the unification process, Garibaldi had been wounded by the army of the Italian king, whom he had honoured and empowered two years earlier. Halted at Aspromonte, the General retreated to his rural home on the island of Caprera off Sardinia. This soon became the destination for sympathetic admirers, who arranged for eminent surgeons from Italy, Germany and Britain to attend to his leg wound. As has recently been argued, Garibaldi's two year convalescence on Caprera became a stage where his image as a 'simple', 'honest' man helped to broaden his international appeal.

The official reason for Garibaldi's visit to England in the spring of 1864 was to thank the British people for the support they had given to the Italian national movement by condemning the Bourbon tyranny and facilitating the liberation of the South. While the British government had initially been suspicious of Italy's independence movement, spearheaded by the democratic republican, Giuseppe Mazzini, it had welcomed the adoption of the cause by Italian liberal moderates. Indeed Garibaldi, who had initially fought in the name of republican Italy, becoming the darling of northern English radicals in the early 1850s, had himself abandoned Mazzini's republican cause, embracing the moderate solution: Italy's emancipation from foreign rule and unity under a constitutional monarch.

Following the unification of Italy, Garibaldi had come to be seen in Britain as an anti-Catholic, 'liberal hero' rather than as a symbol of radical politics. 'Garibaldimania' gripped England and the market was flooded with objects inspired by the Italian, including Staffordshire figurines, clothing, such as red shirts and aprons, popular songs and the famous 'Garibaldi biscuits'. Shrewd impresarios toured the country with colourful Garibaldi panoramas. Easily transportable ▶

The reasons that led Garibaldi to leave England so abruptly have been linked to the considerable political pressures he faced while there

in horse-drawn coaches, these were shown in corn exchanges, temperance and concert halls, assembly rooms and mechanics' institutes throughout the early 1860s, making Garibaldi a household name. His persona was further enhanced by the presentation of him as a man who possessed the distinct moral and physical attributes of an 'English gentleman', such as having 'blue eyes', which he did not.

The reception that mid-Victorian Britain accorded the 'hero' of the Italian national liberation movement was widely reported in contemporary newspapers. A plethora of invitations, homages, speeches, toasts and displays of affection greeted the 'lion of the season' from a whole cross-section of British society. Garibaldi's visit to England remains, in a non-military context, the most overt manifestation of power that the Italian patriot could exercise on the collective imagination of a nation other than his own. As such it has long been a subject of fascination for scholars. However historians have repeatedly sought to look beyond the multiple examples of enthusiasm for Garibaldi to investigate the reasons for his swift and unexpected departure on April 28th. The reasons that led him to leave the country so abruptly have been linked to the considerable political pressures he faced while there.

A cartoon by John Tenniel for *Punch*, 1864.

WRITING in *History Today* in 1982, John A. Davis claimed that 'as a symbol of idealism tinged by moderation and humanitarian concern free of dogma or fanaticism, Trevelyan's liberal hero' had over the years 'been retailored and modernised, but in essence changed little'. Yet any analysis of Garibaldi at the time of his visit to England must take into account the impact of Lucy Riall's revisionist book, *Garibaldi: Invention of a Hero* (2007). Riall's book has brought new challenges to the historiographical consensus and has made historians more wary of the mulitiple constructions of Garibaldi's public persona. According to Riall, Garibaldi's transnational aura had originally been carefully constructed by the exile Mazzini, who first captured the potential of the revolutionary's personal charisma to boost the popularity of the Italian cause. Yet by 1864 Garibaldi had become well aware that being a 'celebrity' also meant exposing himself to the risk of being hijacked by interested parties: indeed, he had developed his own skills in the art of self-fashioning.

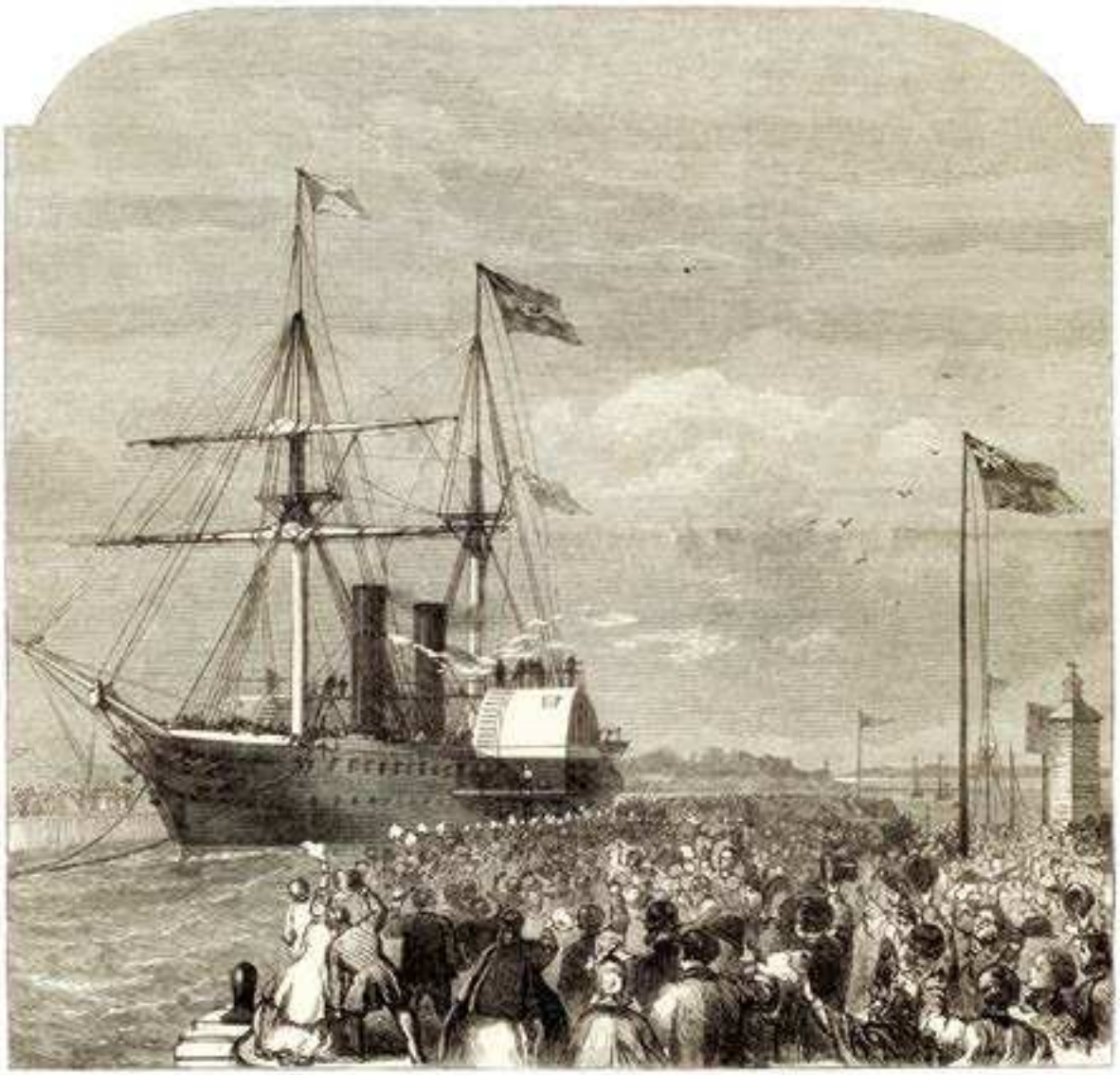
Aware that his visit to England would make him prey to competing interests Garibaldi was eager to maintain his independence. It was this concern that led him to seek a balance between opposing political and social factions and to recoil from any specific association. Arriving in Southampton, he was determined to appear the conciliatory liberal hero, able to breach political divides and class barriers in both Britain and Italy and keen to reassure the establishment that he was no revolutionary. Having handed southern Italy to the Savoy monarch, he nevertheless wished also to reconcile himself with Mazzini. He was delighted to reunite with old friends from the radical camp in Britain, such as George Jacob Holyoake and the Tyneside radical Joseph Cowen, both of whom he had met when visiting London and Newcastle in 1854.

Initially Garibaldi's delicate balancing act seemed to work. In Riall's view, his visit equated to a political 'moment', which attracted equally the liberal elites, trade unionist working men, popular Protestantism and the passion of the people. Yet such harmony was only apparent. Those most exercised by the liberal appropriation of Garibaldi were British radicals, who saw their opposition, the moderate forces in Britain, successfully claim the Italian patriot as their own. That Garibaldi himself might be willing to be claimed by moderates caused them further consternation. Following the announcement of his impending visit, the radical press alerted its readers that the mainstream papers intended to manipulate the occasion by lionising the 'liberal' Garibaldi to the detriment of the image of the radical hero, Mazzini.

As early as March 26th, 1864, on the eve of the day Garibaldi's ship was to dock at Southampton, the radical paper, the *Examiner*, carefully reflected on the forthcoming event, hinting that the occasion could become prey to political manipulations:

Garibaldi's welcome will be spontaneous and universal. All we hope and wish is that no attempt may be made to pervert it to any passing or party purpose of the hour' ... by 'blackening the character of the man [Mazzini] *whom our expected guest has ever been the readiest to honour. We shall be no parties to the perpetration of this miserable fraud. The trick is too palpable not to be seen through.*

Pre-empting the invidious manipulations of the mainstream press (*The Times*, in particular), the *Examiner* chose this occasion to publish long extracts from Mazzini's book, *The Duties of Man* (1860). The paper seized the opportunity to underline how Mazzini, 'who of all foreign patriots is the one most English in tone and mind', had 'combated the errors of French revolutionists'. Radical leaders could



Cheering crowds greet Garibaldi's arrival by steamer in Southampton, April 3rd, 1864 (from the *Illustrated London News*).

not put a stop to the media manipulations that would contribute to the version of Garibaldi as liberal hero: they were duly on guard, however, against the visit being used as an opportunity for negative propaganda against Mazzini. All efforts were made to balance the rhetoric concerning Garibaldi's 'Englishness', by employing the same language of legitimacy in references to Mazzini.

ON APRIL 3RD, Garibaldi's ship was greeted by large crowds and tumultuous cheering. Mobbed by journalists and politicians, he swiftly escaped the initial commotion by accepting an invitation from the radical MP, Charles Seeley, to spend a quiet week at his home on the Isle of Wight. Garibaldi then headed to London, where the density of the crowds turned one phase of a three-mile journey into a lengthy, six-hour progress. It was estimated that half a million people came to greet him in the capital, with more supporters from all over England boarding trains in the following days.

In London Garibaldi gratefully accepted the invitations of the establishment members, who feted him as the champion of moderate liberalism. As guest of the Duke and Duchess of Sutherland, he was escorted by coach to visit

Right: Garibaldi is presented with the Freedom of the City of London at the Guildhall on April 20th, 1864.

Eton College and was taken to the opera at Covent Garden, where he was applauded by an enraptured audience. He was introduced to politicians, including Gladstone, Palmerston, Lord Russell, Lord Derby and Lord Malmesbury, and presented to distinguished personalities, such as Florence Nightingale and the Archbishop of Canterbury. Garibaldi also attended a gala at the Fishmongers' Hall, where around 150 guests were invited, including the Duchess of Sutherland, the Duke and Duchess of Argyll and the Earl and ▶

Countess of Shaftesbury. One of the honorary members of the Fishmongers' guild, Earl Shaftesbury, declared that Garibaldi's name would be 'for long a household word in every heart and in every home of the British empire'. The freedom of the Fishmongers' guild was one of several honours he accumulated, including the Freedom of the City of London. As Gladstone's biographer John Morley commented in 1903, 'what fired the hearts of most was the thought of [Garibaldi] as the soldier who bore the sword of freedom'.

During his brief visit Garibaldi also attended two rallies at Crystal Palace, which not only drew enthusiastic supporters from working people as far afield as Hull, but also attracted refugees, such as revolutionary Poles seeking the General's support for the Polish uprising. A delegation of Italians presented Garibaldi with a banner significantly inscribed with the words 'Rome and Venice', the cities that had not yet been liberated. Despite the vast crowds, the rallies did not overly concern the establishment and indeed Garibaldi seemed to please English policemen. On one of these occasions, attracting around 30,000 people, Garibaldi publicly thanked the British fleet for ensuring, with its presence in the Straits of Messina, that his 'Thousand' volunteers could safely land in Sicily and liberate the south.

Earl Shaftesbury declared that Garibaldi's name would be 'for long a household word in every heart and in every home of the British empire'

Garibaldi's decision to attend a private dinner held in Teddington at the house of the Russian political refugee Alexander Herzen, proved more controversial. For the General this was a sort of reunion with old friends. The gathering included a number of socialist and radical foreign refugees, as well as Mazzini. The meeting was a momentous opportunity for reconciliation between Garibaldi and Mazzini. It opened up the possibility that they might still work together to liberate Rome and, in Mazzini's eyes, reverse the previous course of events by completing Italy's liberation under a republican banner. National papers, including the *Daily Mail*, published Garibaldi's speech made at Herzen's house in homage to Mazzini, wherein he acknowledged his debt to his 'friend and tutor', who, above all else, had worked for the cause of liberty in Italy. However, the speech was an embarrassment both to the British and Italian governments. Garibaldi's visit to Herzen's house, a regular haunt for revolutionaries, came as an unnerving shock to the British establishment. It highlighted the mixed messages coming from Garibaldi. The Duke of Sutherland consequently called for a medical visit from Queen Victoria's physician, who promptly diagnosed exhaustion, recommending that Garibaldi cut short his visit.

This intervention proved highly controversial. Every detail of Garibaldi's itinerary was being scrutinised by those keen to draw the General into their camp. The Italian government, concerned by the news of the meeting with Mazzini, had sent its emissaries to London in the hope that Garibaldi could be swung towards embracing an official role. The Italian republicans led by Mazzini, meanwhile, were keen to use Garibaldi's presence to help raise funds for the republican party in Italy. British provincial radicals were equally keen to build on what Derek Beales has defined as the 'politics of enthusiasm' for Garibaldi, in order to radicalise the masses: indeed they sought to steer Garibaldi's visit away from the capital, where he was courted by aristocratic admirers, and entice him to the provinces, where demonstrations were planned between Manchester, Newcastle-upon-Tyne and Glasgow. In Mazzini's view, too, this was the best plan, as it would ensure the greatest financial return from the subscriptions of northern British supporters.

Yet this ambition failed miserably. The authorities' micro-management of Garibaldi's visit was a triumph. According to the prime minister, Lord Palmerston, Britons on this occasion had displayed 'the community of feeling among all classes of the nation'. Mazzini's hope to steer Garibaldi towards the expectant radicals in the provinces

Garibaldi feted at Crystal Palace, *Illustrated London News* engraving, April 1864.

Contemporary portrait of the Italian republican, Giuseppe Mazzini.

was spectacularly thwarted. Although Garibaldi did meet some of his republican friends, aristocrats fearing that the Italian patriot's presence might be used for seditious purposes succeeded in containing the majority of British radicals and preventing them from approaching him. Mazzini, who knew the stakes were high, had originally planned for Garibaldi's journey to start in the provinces. According to the radical lawyer, William Ashurst, it was essential for Garibaldi to realise 'the importance of coming out as much as possible as a pro-Mazzite' and this would be less likely if the journey were to begin 'with the Londoners and the aristocrats'.

Staffordshire figurine of Garibaldi, in his uniform red shirt, with his horse.

The view from the radical camp was that Mazzini and his friends had been snubbed. Italian republicans were acutely aware of this and were embarrassed and hurt by the way Mazzini had been sidelined. In an attempt to shield Mazzini from public humiliation the republican paper, *Unità Italiana*, published on May 3rd a revealing address to Mazzini composed anonymously by one of the republican's most loyal followers, Maurizio Quadrio. Referring to Mazzini as the 'indefatigable apostle' of united Italy, the address stressed that Italian workers in London had 'not forgotten' that the exile had sacrificed his entire life to the national cause, leading the fight against all odds. Meanwhile English radical followers, such as Holyoake, Cowen, P. A. Taylor and John McAdam, who had organised Garibaldi's reception in their respective areas with great anticipation of his visit, were left venting their frustration at the news of its cancellation, accusing the government of underhand manoeuvres. Yet, as one of Mazzini's radical friends bitterly acknowledged: 'The saddest part of the affair' was 'Garibaldi's part in it.'

AT THE NEWS of Garibaldi's abrupt departure British Mazzinians rallied to denounce the government's conduct, claiming that Garibaldi was in fact in perfectly good health and able to undertake the journey to the north. Garibaldi had hinted to radicals that his departure was due to the fact that he felt unwelcomed by the authorities. Yet when, on Garibaldi's return to Caprera, British radicals published some declarations suggesting that the establishment had forced him to leave England, Garibaldi publicly declared this to be untrue. As Jasper Ridley affirmed, Mazzinians were disgusted. They felt that their best opportunity to raise British funds for the liberation of Rome and Venice was now lost and that this was due to Garibaldi giving in to pressures from his aristocratic friends.

Garibaldi's decision not to mention his London visit in his memoirs has sometimes left historians baffled: Giuseppe Monsagrati attributed this omission to Garibaldi's genuine, understated modesty. But, though Garibaldi's self-effacing traits are a defining element of his character, his sensitivity to the bitter feelings his visit to London incurred among radicals also suggests the omission was in part due to a sense of embarrassment or discomfort towards those who had once been his closest associates.

In spite of Garibaldi's best efforts, the political balancing act was too great to sustain. His overwhelming popularity had clearly become a cause for concern for the British government. While Garibaldi allowed the reason for his premature departure to be put down to his poor health, details soon emerged of a conversation between Garibaldi and the Liberal Chancellor of the Exchequer, William Gladstone, in which it was made clear the General was no longer welcome and that this was the real reason behind his decision to leave Britain.

British radicals did not miss the opportunity to express their disappointment. By April 25th British and foreign papers were reporting angry meetings convened in London to denounce the treatment of the Italian 'hero'. As the ▶

Italian republican, Giorgio Asproni, commented, the British had grasped that their government had acted under the pressure of Continental governments – not least that of the French, which still guarded the pope's temporal power in Rome – in defiance of Garibaldi's wish to liberate the city. Reacting to such blatant interference in foreign diplomacy, British radicals had plenty of ammunition to mobilise the people. Indeed, according to the Italian government's intelligence, Palmerston was so alarmed at the sudden change of mood that he begged Garibaldi, at the last minute, not to set sail. It was too late. Palmerston's *volte face* was dictated by his political nous. Garibaldi's uncomfortable and unexpected exit caused such a sea change that a visit that had been welcomed by the authorities as an ordered expression of unified celebration became instead a catalyst for radical action.

The historian Margot Finn has argued that it was Garibaldi's premature, enforced departure and the government's poor defence of its own underhand conduct that hastened the radicals' agitation in the following months. Two developments emerged from the protests. The first was an allegiance between the middle and working classes, who lobbied for political reform, formed the first nucleus of the Reform League and demanded the extension of the franchise. The second was a movement centred around the working-class Garibaldian Trades Committee, which conflated the Italian patriot's association with the demands

Above: crowds in Trafalgar Square greeting Garibaldi's arrival at Charing Cross, an engraving from the *Illustrated London News.* Left: Garibaldi with friends in England during his visit.

for French revolutionary ideals. It would result in the establishment of the International Working Men's Association that same year. As Garibaldi left Britain, his name was therefore once again appropriated for new aims and purposes. These would not benefit Mazzinians, however. The First International would see Mazzini's vision of harmonious association between the classes lose to the Marxists' ideal of class-conscious conflict.

Given the extraordinary public attention generated by Garibaldi's visit to England, it is not surprising that the episode was mythologised. Joseph Cowen, who clearly forgave Garibaldi for failing to travel to the north, commissioned George Burn to sculpt a stone statue of the Italian holding the telescope and sword that Tyneside workers had given to him when he had visited Newcastle as a revolutionary republican in 1854. The statue was eventually unveiled in 1868 at Blaydon (where Cowen's brick factory and home were situated). Garibaldi's popularity among Tyneside workers by this time is unclear. Locals largely agree, however, that decades later, in 1900, discontented workers, mindful of resentment harboured at Cowen's enforced penny levy towards the cost of the statue, vented their frustration by destroying it.

London radicals could not reconcile themselves with Garibaldi's compliance with the British aristocracy and the Italian monarchy

There is also evidence of resentment among commentators within the London radical milieu, who could not reconcile themselves with Garibaldi's compliance with the British aristocracy and his bowing to the authority of Victor Emmanuel II. In the autumn of 1864 the London paper, the *Athaeneum,* reflected critically on recent events. Garibaldi's visit to England and the mistreatment of Mazzini stood out. According to the London paper, Mazzini, who had 'the misfortune of being a republican', was 'the best abused man in Europe', and just like a previous great republican Englishman, John Milton, he would 'appear better in history than in life'. Having paid lip service to the common comparison made in radical literature between the 'visible victory' of the 'man of action' and the obscured labours of the 'man of thought', the *Athenaeum* concluded that the significance of Garibaldi's visit to England was encapsulated in that 'proud moment' when the General had acknowledged his debt to his teacher. There was no condoning of Garibaldi's conduct during his London visit, however. If the memory of the cheering crowds validated, for some, Garibaldi's well-deserved popularity, the *Athenaeum* showed no desire for underscoring such feelings, waspishly commenting: 'Signor Mazzini is to the thinking few just what General Garibaldi is to the unthinking many.'

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Above: George Jacob Holyoake, social reformer. Right: the Tyneside radical, Joseph Cowen, painted in 1864.

From the Archive

Garibaldi and England

John A. Davis considers Garibaldi's 1864 visit to England 100 years after the revolutionary's death.

www.historytoday.com/archive

FURTHER READING

Marcella Pellegrino Sutcliffe, 'British Red Shirts: A History of the Garibaldi Volunteers (1860)' in Nir Airelli and Bruce Collins (eds), *Transnational Foreign Soldiers* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

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